

ESSAY X.

S L A V E R Y.*

EVERY one must be sensible that a very great change has, within a few years, been produced in the feelings, if not in the opinions of the public in relation to slavery. It is not long since the acknowledgment was frequent at the south, and universal at the north, that it was a great evil. It was spoken of in the slaveholding states, as a sad inheritance fixed upon them by the cupidity of the mother-country in spite of their repeated remonstrances. The known sentiments of Jefferson were reiterated again and again in every part of his native state; and some of the strongest denunciations of this evil, and some of the most ardent aspirations for deliverance from it ever uttered in the country, were pronounced, but a few years since, in the legislature of Virginia. A proposition to call a convention, with the purpose of so amending the constitution of the state as to admit of the general emancipation of the slaves, is said to have failed in the legislature of Kentucky by a single vote.† The sentiments of the northern states had long since been clearly expressed, by the abolition of slavery within their limits. That the same opinions and the same feelings continued to prevail among them, may be inferred, not only from the absence of all evidence to the contrary, but from various decisive indications of a positive character. In the year 1828 a resolution was passed by an almost unanimous vote in the legislature of Pennsylvania, instructing their Senators in Congress to endeavour to procure the passage of a law abolishing slavery in the District of Columbia. In 1829 a similar resolution was adopted by the assembly of New York. In 1828 a petition to this effect was presented to Congress, signed by one thousand inhabitants of the District itself; and the House of Representatives instructed the proper committee, in 1829, to inquire into the expediency of

* Originally published in 1836, in review of "Slavery. By William E. Channing."

† It is probable that many reasons combined to make a convention desirable to those who voted for it. But to get rid of slavery, was said to be one of the most prominent.

the measure.* How altered is the present state of the country ! Instead of lamentations and acknowledgments, we hear from the south the strongest language of justification. And at the north, opposition to the proceedings of the anti-slavery societies seems to be rapidly producing a public feeling in favour of slavery itself. The freedom of discussion, the liberty of the press, and the right of assembling for consultation, have in some cases been assailed, and in others trampled under foot by popular violence. What has produced this lamentable change ? No doubt, many circumstances have combined in its production. We think, however, that all impartial observers must acknowledge, that by far the most prominent cause is the conduct of the abolitionists. They indeed naturally resist this imputation ; and endeavour to show its injustice by appealing to the fact that their opinions of slavery have been entertained and expressed by many of the best men of former days. This appeal, however, is by no means satisfactory. The evil in question has been produced by no mere expression of opinion. Had the abolitionists confined themselves to their professed object, and endeavoured to effect their purpose by arguments addressed to the understandings and consciences of their fellow-citizens, no man could have any reason to complain. Under ordinary circumstances, such arguments as those presented on this subject in Dr. Wayland's *Elements of Moral Science*, and in Dr. Channing's recent publication, would have been received with respect and kindness in every part of the country. We make this assertion, because the same sentiments, more offensively, and less ably urged, have heretofore been thus received.

It is not by argument that the abolitionists have produced the present unhappy excitement. Argument has not been the characteristic of their publications. Denunciations of slaveholding, as man-stealing, robbery, piracy, and worse than murder ; consequent vituperation of slaveholders as knowingly guilty of the worst of crimes ; passionate appeals to the feelings of the inhabitants of the northern states ; gross exaggerations of the moral and physical condition of the slaves, have formed the staple of their addresses to the public. We do not mean to say that there has been no calm and Christian discussion of the subject. We mean merely, to state what has, to the best of our knowledge, been the predominant character of the anti-slavery publications. There is one circumstance which renders the error and guilt of this course of conduct chargeable, in a great measure, on the abolitionists as a body, and even upon those of their number who have pursued a different course. We refer to the fact that they have upheld the most extreme publications, and made common cause with the most reckless declaimers. The wildest ravings of the *Liberator* have been constantly lauded ; agents have been commissioned whose great distinction was a talent for eloquent vituperation ; coincidence of opinion as to the single point of immediate emancipation has

* Jay's Inquiry, pp. 157, 161.

been sufficient to unite men of the most discordant character. There is in this conduct such a strange want of adaptation between the means and the end which they profess to have in view, as to stagger the faith of most persons in the sincerity of their professions, who do not consider the extremes to which even good men may be carried, when they allow one subject to take exclusive possession of their minds. We do not doubt their sincerity; but we marvel at their delusion. They seem to have been led by the mere impulse of feeling, and a blind imitation of their predecessors in England, to a course of measures, which, though rational under one set of circumstances, is the height of infatuation under another. The English abolitionists addressed themselves to a community, which, though it owned no slaves, had the power to abolish slavery, and was therefore responsible for its continuance. Their object was to rouse that community to immediate action. For this purpose they addressed themselves to the feelings of the people; they portrayed in the strongest colours the misery of the slaves; they dilated on the gratuitous crime of which England was guilty in perpetuating slavery, and did all they could to excite the passions of the public. This was the very course most likely to succeed, and it did succeed. Suppose, however, that the British parliament had no power over the subject; that it rested entirely with the colonial Assemblies to decide whether slavery should be abolished or not. Does any man believe the abolitionists would have gained their object? Did they in fact make converts of the planters? Did they even pretend that such was their design? Every one knows that their conduct produced a state of almost frantic excitement in the West India Islands; that so far from the public feeling in England producing a moral impression upon the planters favourable to the condition of the slaves, its effect was directly the reverse. It excited them to drive away the missionaries, to tear down the chapels, to manifest a determination to rivet still more firmly the chains on their helpless captives, and to resist to the utmost all attempts for their emancipation or even improvement. All this was natural, though it was all, under the circumstances, of no avail, except to rouse the spirit of the mother country, and to endanger the result of the experiment of emancipation, by exasperating the feelings of the slaves. Precisely similar has been the result of the efforts of the American abolitionists as it regarded the slaveholders of America. They have produced a state of alarming exasperation at the south, injurious to the slave and dangerous to the country, while they have failed to enlist the feelings of the north. This failure has resulted, not so much from diversity of opinion on the abstract question of slavery, or from want of sympathy among northern men in the cause of human rights, as from the fact, that the common sense of the public has been shocked by the incongruity and folly of hoping to effect the abolition of slavery in one country, by addressing the people of another. We do not expect to abolish des-

potism in Russia, by getting up indignation-meetings in New York. Yet for all the purposes of legislation on this subject, Russia is not more a foreign country to us than South Carolina. The idea of inducing the southern slaveholder to emancipate his slaves by denunciation, is about as rational as to expect the sovereigns of Europe to grant free institutions, by calling them tyrants and robbers. Could we send our denunciations of despotism among the subjects of those monarchs, and rouse the people to a sense of their wrongs and a determination to redress them, there would be some prospect of success. But our northern abolitionists disclaim with great earnestness all intention of allowing their appeals to reach the ears of the slaves. It is therefore not to be wondered at, that the course pursued by the anti-slavery societies should produce exasperation at the south, without conciliating sympathy at the north. The impolicy of their conduct is so obvious, that men who agree with them as to all their leading principles, not only stand aloof from their measures, but unhesitatingly condemn their conduct. This is the case with Dr. Channing. Although his book was written rather to repress the feeling of opposition to these societies, than to encourage it, yet he fully admits the justice of the principal charges brought against them. We extract a few passages on this subject. "The abolitionists have done wrong, I believe; nor is their wrong to be winked at, because done fanatically, or with good intentions; for how much mischief may be wrought with good designs! They have fallen into the common error of enthusiasts, that of exaggerating their object, of feeling as if no evil existed but that which they opposed, and as if no guilt could be compared with that of countenancing and upholding it. The tone of their newspapers, as far as I have seen them, has often been fierce, bitter, and abusive." P. 133. "Another objection to their movements is, that they have sought to accomplish their object by a system of agitation; that is, by a system of affiliated societies gathered, and held together, and extended, by passionate eloquence." "The abolitionists might have formed an association; but it should have been an elective one. Men of strong principles, judiciousness, sobriety, should have been carefully sought as members. Much good might have been accomplished by the co-operation of such philanthropists. Instead of this, the abolitionists sent forth their orators, some of them transported with fiery zeal to sound the alarm against slavery through the land, to gather together young and old, pupils from schools, females hardly arrived at years of discretion, the ignorant, the excitable, the impetuous; and to organize these into associations for the battle against oppression. Very unhappily they preached their doctrine to the coloured people, and collected these into societies. To this mixed and excitable multitude, minute, heart-rending descriptions of slavery were given in the piercing tones of passion; and slaveholders were held up as monsters of cruelty and crime." P. 136. "The abolitionists often speak of Luther's vehemence as a model to future reformers. But who,

that has read history, does not know that Luther's reformation was accompanied by tremendous miseries and crimes, and that its progress was soon arrested? and is there not reason to fear, that the fierce, bitter, persecuting spirit, which he breathed into the work, not only tarnished its glory, but limited its power? One great principle which we should lay down as immovably true, is, that if a good work cannot be carried on by the calm, self-controlled, benevolent spirit of Christianity, then the time for doing it has not come. God asks not the aid of our vices. He can overrule them for good, but they are not the chosen instruments of human happiness." P. 138. "The adoption of the common system of agitation by the abolitionists has proved signally unsuccessful. From the beginning it created alarm in the considerate, and strengthened the sympathies of the free states with the slaveholder. It made converts of a few individuals, but alienated multitudes. Its influence at the south has been evil without mixture. It has stirred up bitter passions and a fierce fanaticism, which have shut every ear and every heart against its arguments and persuasions. These effects are the more to be deplored, because the hope of freedom to the slave lies chiefly in the dispositions of his master. The abolitionist indeed proposed to convert the slaveholders; and for this end he approached them with vituperation and exhausted on them the vocabulary of abuse! And he has reaped as he sowed." P. 142.

Unmixed good or evil, however, in such a world as ours, is a very rare thing. Though the course pursued by the abolitionists has produced a great preponderance of mischief, it may incidentally occasion no little good. It has rendered it incumbent on every man to endeavour to obtain, and, as far as he can, to communicate definite opinions and correct principles on the whole subject. The community are very apt to sink down into indifference to a state of things of long continuance, and to content themselves with vague impressions as to right and wrong on important points, when there is no call for immediate action. From this state the abolitionists have effectually roused the public mind. The subject of slavery is no longer one on which men are allowed to be of no mind at all. The question is brought up before all our public bodies, civil and religious. Almost every ecclesiastical society has in some way been called to express an opinion on the subject; and these calls are constantly repeated. Under these circumstances, it is the duty of all in their appropriate sphere, to seek for truth, and to utter it in love.

"The first question," says Dr. Channing, "to be proposed by a rational being, is not what is profitable, but what is right. Duty must be primary, prominent, most conspicuous, among the objects of human thought and pursuit. If we cast it down from its supremacy, if we inquire first for our interests and then for our duties, we shall certainly err. We can never see the right clearly and fully, but by making it our first concern. . . . Right is the

supreme good, and includes all other goods. In seeking and adhering to it, we secure our true and only happiness. All prosperity, not founded on it, is built on sand. If human affairs are controlled, as we believe, by almighty rectitude and impartial goodness, then to hope for happiness from wrong doing is as insane as to seek health and prosperity by rebelling against the laws of nature, by sowing our seed on the ocean, or making poison our common food. There is but one unfailing good; and that is, fidelity to the everlasting law written on the heart, and re-written and republished in God's word.

"Whoever places this faith in the everlasting law of rectitude must, of course, regard the question of slavery, first and chiefly, as a moral question. All other considerations will weigh little with him compared with its moral character and moral influences. The following remarks, therefore, are designed to aid the reader in forming a just moral judgment of slavery. Great truths, inalienable rights, everlasting duties, these will form the chief subjects of this discussion. There are times when the assertion of great principles is the best service a man can render society. The present is a moment of bewildering excitement, when men's minds are stormed and darkened by strong passions and fierce conflicts; and also a moment of absorbing worldliness, when the moral law is made to bow to expediency, and its high and strict requirements are decried or dismissed as metaphysical abstractions, or impracticable theories. At such a season to utter great principles without passion, and in the spirit of unfeigned and universal good will, and to engrave them deeply and durably on men's minds, is to do more for the world than to open mines of wealth, or to frame the most successful schemes of policy."

No man can refuse assent to these principles. The great question, therefore, in relation to slavery is, what is right? What are the moral principles which should control our opinions and conduct in regard to it? Before attempting an answer to this question, it is proper to remark, that we recognise no authoritative rule of truth and duty but the word of God. Plausible as may be the arguments deduced from general principles to prove a thing to be true or false, right and wrong, there is almost always room for doubt and honest diversity of opinion. Clear as we may think the arguments against despotism, there ever have been thousands of enlightened and good men, who honestly believe it to be of all forms of government the best and most acceptable to God. Unless we can approach the consciences of men, clothed with some more imposing authority than that of our own opinions and arguments, we shall gain little permanent influence. Men are too nearly upon a par as to their powers of reasoning and ability to discover truth, to make the conclusions of one mind an authoritative rule for others. It is our object, therefore, not to discuss the subject of slavery upon abstract principles, but to ascertain the scriptural rule of judgment and conduct in relation to it. We do

not intend to enter upon any minute or extended examination of scriptural passages, because all that we wish to assume, as to the meaning of the word of God, is so generally admitted as to render the laboured proof of it unnecessary.

It is on all hands acknowledged that at the time of the advent of Jesus Christ, slavery in its worst forms prevailed over the whole world. The Saviour found it around him in Judea; the apostles met with it in Asia, Greece and Italy. How did they treat it? Not by the denunciation of slave-holding as necessarily and universally sinful. Not by declaring that all slaveholders were men-stealers and robbers, and consequently to be excluded from the church and the kingdom of heaven. Not by insisting on immediate emancipation. Not by appeals to the passions of men on the evils of slavery, or by the adoption of a system of universal agitation. On the contrary, it was by teaching the true nature, dignity, equality and destiny of men; by inculcating the principles of justice and love; and by leaving these principles to produce their legitimate effects in meliorating the condition of all classes of society. We need not stop to prove that such was the course pursued by our Saviour and his apostles, because the fact is in general acknowledged, and various reasons are assigned by the abolitionists and others, to account for it. The subject is hardly alluded to by Christ in any of his personal instructions. The apostles refer to it, not to pronounce upon it as a question of morals, but to prescribe the relative duties of masters and slaves. They caution those slaves who have believing or Christian masters, not to despise them because they were on a perfect religious equality with them, but to consider the fact that their masters were their brethren, as an additional reason for obedience. It is remarkable that there is not even an exhortation to masters to liberate their slaves, much less is it urged as an imperative and immediate duty. They are commanded to be kind, merciful and just; and to remember that they have a Master in heaven. Paul represents this relation as of comparatively little account. "Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called. Art thou called being a servant (or slave), care not for it; though, should the opportunity of freedom be presented, embrace it. These external relations, however, are of little importance, for every Christian is a freeman in the highest and best sense of the word, and at the same time is under the strongest bonds to Christ." 1 Cor. vii., 20-22. It is not worth while to shut our eyes to these facts. They will remain, whether we refuse to see them and be instructed by them or not. If we are wiser, better, more courageous than Christ and his apostles, let us say so; but it will do no good, under a paroxysm of benevolence, to attempt to tear the Bible to pieces, or to extort, by violent exegesis, a meaning foreign to its obvious sense. Whatever inferences may be fairly deducible from the fact, the fact itself cannot be denied that Christ and his inspired followers did treat the subject of slavery in the

manner stated above. This being the case, we ought carefully to consider their conduct in this respect, and inquire what lessons that conduct should teach us.

We think no one will deny that the plan adopted by the Saviour and his immediate followers must be the correct plan, and therefore obligatory upon us, unless it can be shown that their circumstances were so different from ours, as to make the rule of duty different in the two cases. The obligation to point out and establish this difference rests of course upon those who have adopted a course diametrically the reverse of that which Christ pursued. They have not acquitted themselves of this obligation. They do not seem to have felt it necessary to reconcile their conduct with his; nor does it appear to have occurred to them, that their violent denunciation of slaveholding and of slaveholders is an indirect reflection on his wisdom, virtue, or courage. If the present course of the abolitionists is right, then the course of Christ and the apostles was wrong. For the circumstances of the two cases are, as far as we can see, in all essential particulars the same. They appeared as teachers of morality and religion, not as politicians. The same is the fact with our abolitionists. They found slavery authorized by the laws of the land. So do we. They were called upon to receive into the communion of the Christian Church, both slave-owners and slaves. So are we. They instructed these different classes of persons as to their respective duties. So do we. Where then is the difference between the two cases? If we are right in insisting that slaveholding is one of the greatest of all sins; that it should be immediately and universally abandoned as a condition of church communion, or admission into heaven; how comes it that Christ and his apostles did not pursue the same course? We see no way of escape from the conclusion that the conduct of the modern abolitionists, being directly opposed to that of the authors of our religion, must be wrong, and ought to be modified or abandoned.

An equally obvious deduction from the fact above referred to, is, that slaveholding is not necessarily sinful. The assumption of the contrary is the great reason why the modern abolitionists have adopted their peculiar course. They argue thus: slaveholding is under all circumstances sinful; it must, therefore, under all circumstances, and at all hazards, be immediately abandoned. This reasoning is perfectly conclusive. If there is error anywhere, it is in the premises and not in the deduction. It requires no argument to show that sin ought to be at once abandoned. Everything, therefore, is conceded which the abolitionists need require, when it is granted that slaveholding is in itself a crime. But how can this assumption be reconciled with the conduct of Christ and the apostles? Did they shut their eyes to the enormities of a great offence against God and man? Did they temporize with a heinous evil because it was common and popular? Did they abstain from even exhorting masters to emancipate their slaves, though an imperative

duty, from fear of consequences? Did they admit the perpetrators of the greatest crimes to the Christian communion? Who will undertake to charge the blessed Redeemer and his inspired followers with such connivance at sin, and such fellowship with iniquity? Were drunkards, murderers, liars, and adulterers, thus treated? Were they passed over without even an exhortation to forsake their sins? Were they recognised as Christians? It cannot be that slaveholding belongs to the same category with these crimes; and to assert the contrary is to assert that Christ is the minister of sin.

This is a point of so much importance, lying as it does at the very foundation of the whole subject, that it deserves to be attentively considered. The grand mistake, as we apprehend, of those who maintain that slaveholding is itself a crime, is, that they do not discriminate between slaveholding in itself considered, and its accessories at any particular time or place. Because masters may treat their slaves unjustly, or governments make oppressive laws in relation to them, is no more a valid argument against the lawfulness of slaveholding, than the abuse of parental authority, or the unjust political laws of certain states, is an argument against the lawfulness of the parental relation, or of civil government. This confusion of points so widely distinct, appears to us to run through almost all the popular publications on slavery, and to vitiate their arguments. Mr. Jay, for example, quotes the second article of the constitution of the American Anti-Slavery Society, which declares that "slaveholding is a heinous crime in the sight of God," and then, to justify this declaration, makes large citations from the laws of the several southern States, to show what the system of slavery is in this country, and concludes by saying, "This is the system which the American Anti-Slavery Society declares to be sinful, and ought therefore to be immediately abolished." There is, however, no necessary connexion between his premises and conclusion. We may admit all those laws which forbid the instruction of slaves; which interfere with their marital or parental rights; which subject them to the insults and oppression of the whites, to be in the highest degree unjust, without at all admitting that slaveholding itself is a crime. Slavery may exist without any one of these concomitants. In pronouncing on the moral character of an act, it is obviously necessary to have a clear idea of what it is; yet how few of those who denounce slavery have any well defined conception of its nature! They have a confused idea of chains and whips, of degradation and misery, of ignorance and vice, and to this complex conception they apply the name slavery, and denounce it as the aggregate of all moral and physical evil. Do such persons suppose that slavery as it existed in the family of Abraham, was such as their imaginations thus picture to themselves? Might not that patriarch have had men purchased with his silver, who were well clothed, well instructed, well compensated for their labour, and in all respects treated with parental kindness? Neither inadequate

remuneration, physical discomfort, intellectual ignorance, moral degradation, is essential to the condition of a slave. Yet if all these ideas are removed from the commonly received notion of slavery, how little will remain. All the ideas which necessarily enter into the definition of slavery are deprivation of personal liberty, obligation of service at the discretion of another, and the transferable character of the authority and claim of service of the master.* The manner in which men are brought into this condition, its continuance, and the means adopted for securing the authority and claim of masters, are all incidental and variable. They may be reasonable or unreasonable, just or unjust, at different times and places. The question, therefore, which the abolitionists have undertaken to decide, is, not whether the laws enacted in the slaveholding states in relation to this subject are just or not, but whether slaveholding, in itself considered, is a crime. The confusion of these two points has not only brought the abolitionists into conflict with the scriptures, but it has, as a necessary consequence, prevented their gaining the confidence of the north, or power over the conscience of the south. When southern Christians are told that they are guilty of a heinous crime, worse than piracy, robbery or murder, because they hold slaves, though they know that Christ and his apostles never denounced slaveholding as a crime, never called upon men to renounce it as a condition of admission into the church, they are shocked and offended, without being convinced. They are sure that their accusers cannot be wiser or better than their divine Master, and their consciences are untouched by denunciations which they know, if well founded, must affect not them only, but the authors of the religion of the Bible.

The argument from the conduct of Christ and his immediate followers seems to us decisive on the point, that slaveholding, in itself considered, is not a crime. Let us see how this argument has been answered. In the able "Address to the Presbyterians of Kentucky, proposing a plan for the instruction and emancipation of their slaves, by a committee of the synod of Kentucky," there is a strong and extended argument to prove the sinfulness of slavery *as it exists among us*, to which we have little to object. When, however, the distinguished drafter of that address comes to answer the objection, "God's word sanctions slavery, and it cannot therefore be sinful," he forgets the essential limitation of the proposition which he had undertaken to establish, and proceeds to prove that the Bible condemns slaveholding, and not merely the kind or system of slavery which prevails in this country. The argument drawn from the scriptures, he says, needs no elaborate reply. If the Bible sanctions slavery, it sanctioned the kind of slavery which then prevailed; the atrocious system which authorized masters to

* Paley's definition is still more simple: "I define," he says, "slavery to be an obligation to labour for the benefit of the master, without the contract or consent of the servant." *Moral Philosophy*, book iii., ch. 3.

starve their slaves, to torture them, to beat them, to put them to death, and to throw them into their fish ponds. And he justly asks, whether a man could insult the God of heaven worse than by saying he does not disapprove of such a system? Dr. Channing presents strongly the same view, and says, that an infidel would be labouring in his vocation in asserting that the Bible does not condemn slavery. These gentlemen, however, are far too clear-sighted not to discover, on a moment's reflection, that they have allowed their benevolent feelings to blind them to the real point at issue. No one denies that the Bible condemns all injustice, cruelty, oppression, and violence. And just so far as the laws then existing authorized these crimes the Bible condemned them. But what stronger argument can be presented to prove that the sacred writers did not regard slaveholding as in itself sinful, than that while they condemn all unjust or unkind treatment (even threatening) on the part of masters towards their slaves, they did not condemn slavery itself? While they required the master to treat his slave according to the law of love, they did not command him to set him free. The very atrocity, therefore, of the system which then prevailed, instead of weakening the argument, gives it tenfold strength. Then, if ever, when the institution was so fearfully abused, we might expect to hear the interpreters of the divine will saying that a system which leads to such results is the concentrated essence of all crimes, and must be instantly abandoned on pain of eternal condemnation. This, however, they did not say, and we cannot now force them to say it. They treated the subject precisely as they did the cruel despotism of the Roman emperors. The licentiousness, the injustice, the rapine and murders of those wicked men, they condemned with the full force of divine authority; but the mere extent of their power, though so liable to abuse, they left unnoticed.

Another answer to the argument in question is, that "The New Testament does condemn slaveholding, *as practised among us*, in the most explicit terms furnished by the language in which the sacred penmen wrote." This assertion is supported by saying that God has condemned slavery, because he has specified the parts which compose it and condemned them, one by one, in the most ample and unequivocal form.* It is to be remarked that the saving clause, "*slaveholding as it exists among us*," is introduced into the statement, though it seems to be lost sight of in the illustration and confirmation of it which follow. We readily admit, that if God does condemn all the parts of which slavery consists, he condemns slavery itself. But the drafter of the address has made no attempt to prove that this is actually done in the sacred scriptures. That many of the attributes of the system, as established by law in this country, are condemned, is indeed very plain; but that slaveholding in itself is condemned, has not been and cannot be proved. The writer, indeed, says, "The Greek language had a word cor-

* Address, &c., p. 20.

responding exactly, in signification, with our word servant, but it had none which answered precisely to our term slave. How then was an apostle writing in Greek, to condemn our slavery? How can we expect to find in scripture, the words 'slavery is sinful,' when the language in which it is written contained no term which expressed the meaning of our word slavery?" Does the gentleman mean to say the Greek language could not express the idea that slaveholding is sinful? Could not the apostles have communicated the thought that it was the duty of masters to set their slaves free? Were they obliged from paucity of words to admit slaveholders into the Church? We have no doubt the writer himself could, with all ease, pen a declaration in the Greek language void of all ambiguity, proclaiming freedom to every slave upon earth, and denouncing the vengeance of heaven upon every man who dared to hold a fellow creature in bondage. It is not words we care for. We want evidence that the sacred writers taught that it was incumbent on every slaveholder, as a matter of duty, to emancipate his slaves (which no Roman or Greek law forbade), and that his refusing to do so was a heinous crime in the sight of God. The Greek language must be poor indeed if it cannot convey such ideas.

Another answer is given by Dr. Channing. "Slavery," he says, "in the age of the apostle, had so penetrated society, was so intimately interwoven with it, and the materials of servile war were so abundant, that a religion, preaching freedom to its victims, would have armed against itself the whole power of the State? Of consequence, Paul did not assail it. He satisfied himself with spreading principles, which, however slowly, could not but work its destruction." To the same effect, Dr. Wayland says, "The gospel was designed, not for one race or one time, but for all men and for all times. It looked not at the abolition of this form of evil for that age alone, but for its universal abolition. Hence the important object of its author was to gain it a lodgment in every part of the known world; so that, by its universal diffusion among all classes of society, it might quietly and peaceably modify and subdue the evil passions of men; and thus, without violence, work a revolution in the whole mass of mankind. In this manner alone could its object, a universal moral revolution, be accomplished. For if it had forbidden the *evil* without subduing the *principle*, if it had proclaimed the unlawfulness of slavery, and taught slaves to *resist* the oppression of their masters, it would instantly have arrayed the two parties in deadly hostility throughout the civilized world; its announcement would have been the signal of a servile war; and the very name of the Christian religion would have been forgotten amidst the agitations of universal bloodshed. The fact, under these circumstances, that the gospel does not forbid slavery, affords no reason to suppose that it does not mean to prohibit it, much less does it afford ground for belief that Jesus Christ intended to authorize it."*

* Elements of Moral Science, p. 225.

Before considering the force of this reasoning, it may be well to notice one or two important admissions contained in these extracts. First, then, it is admitted by these distinguished moralists, that the apostles did not preach a religion proclaiming freedom to slaves; that Paul did not assail slavery; that the gospel did not proclaim the unlawfulness of slaveholding; it did not forbid it. This is going the whole length that we have gone in our statement of the conduct of Christ and his apostles. Secondly, these writers admit that the course adopted by the authors of our religion was the only wise and proper one. Paul satisfied himself, says Dr. Channing, with spreading principles, which, however slowly, could not but work its destruction. Dr. Wayland says, that if the apostles had pursued the opposite plan of denouncing slavery as a crime, the Christian religion would have been ruined: its very name would have been forgotten. Then how can the course of the modern abolitionists, under circumstances so nearly similar, or even that of these reverend gentlemen themselves, be right? Why do not they content themselves with doing what Christ and his apostles did? Why must they proclaim the unlawfulness of slavery? Is human nature so much altered, that a course which would have produced universal bloodshed, and led to the very destruction of the Christian religion in one age, is wise and Christian in another?

Let us, however, consider the force of the argument as stated above. It amounts to this. Christ and his apostles thought slaveholding a great crime, but they abstained from saying so for fear of the consequences. The very statement of the argument, in its naked form, is its refutation. These holy men did not refrain from condemning sin from a regard to the consequences. They did not hesitate to array against the religion which they taught, the strongest passions of men. Nor did they content themselves with denouncing the general principles of evil; they condemned its special manifestations. They did not simply forbid intemperate sensual indulgence, and leave it to their hearers to decide what did or what did not come under that name. They declared that no fornicator, no adulterer, no drunkard, could be admitted into the kingdom of heaven. They did not hesitate, even, when a little band, a hundred and twenty souls, to place themselves in direct and irreconcilable opposition to the whole polity, civil and religious, of the Jewish state. It will hardly be maintained that slavery was at that time more intimately interwoven with the institutions of society, than idolatry was. It entered into the arrangements of every family; of every city and province, and of the whole Roman empire. The emperor was the Pontifex Maximus; every department of the state, civil and military, was pervaded by it. It was so united with the fabric of the government that it could not be removed without effecting a revolution in all its parts. The apostles knew this. They knew that to denounce polytheism was to array against them the whole power

of the state. Their divine Master had distinctly apprised them of the result. He told them that it would set the father against the son, and the son against the father; the mother against the daughter, and the daughter against the mother; and that a man's enemies should be those of his own household. He said that he came not to bring peace but a sword, and that such would be the opposition to his followers, that whosoever killed them, would think he did God service. Yet in view of these certain consequences the apostles did denounce idolatry, not merely in principle, but by name. The result was precisely what Christ had foretold. The Romans, tolerant of every other religion, bent the whole force of their wisdom and arms to extirpate Christianity. The scenes of bloodshed which century after century followed the introduction of the gospel, did not induce the followers of Christ to keep back or modify the truth. They adhered to their declaration that idolatry was a heinous crime. And they were right. We expect similar conduct of our missionaries. We do not expect them to refrain from denouncing the institutions of the heathen as sinful, because they are popular, or intimately interwoven with society. The Jesuits, who adopted this plan, forfeited the confidence of Christendom, without making converts of the heathen. It is, therefore, perfectly evident that the authors of our religion were not withheld by these considerations, from declaring slavery to be unlawful. If they did abstain from this declaration, as is admitted, it must have been because they did not consider it as in itself a crime. No other solution of their conduct is consistent with their truth or fidelity.

Another answer to the argument from scripture is given by Dr. Channing and others. It is said that it proves too much; that it makes the Bible sanction despotism, even the despotism of Nero. Our reply to this objection shall be very brief. We have already pointed out the fallacy of confounding slaveholding itself with the particular system of slavery prevalent at the time of Christ, and shown that the recognition of slaveholders as Christians, though irreconcilable with the assumption that slavery is a heinous crime, gives no manner of sanction to the atrocious laws and customs of that age in relation to that subject. Because the apostles admitted the masters of slaves to the communion of the church, it would be a strange inference that they would have given this testimony to the Christian character of the master who oppressed, starved, or murdered his slaves. Such a master would have been rejected as an oppressor, or murderer, however, not as a slaveholder. In like manner, the declaration that government is an ordinance of God, that magistrates are to be obeyed within the sphere of their lawful authority; that resistance to them, when in the exercise of that authority, is sinful; gives no sanction to the oppression of the Roman emperors, or to the petty vexations of provincial officers. The argument urged from scripture in favour of passive submission, is not so

exactly parallel with the argument for slavery, as Dr. Channing supposes.* They agree in some points, but they differ in others. The former is founded upon a false interpretation of Rom. xiii., 1-3; it supposes that passage to mean what it does not mean, whereas the latter is founded upon the sense which Dr. C. and other opponents of slavery admit to be the true sense. This must be allowed to alter the case materially. Again, the argument for the lawfulness of slaveholding is not founded on the mere injunction, "Slaves, obey your masters," analogous to the command, "Let every soul be subject to the higher powers," but on the fact that the apostles did not condemn slavery; that they did not require emancipation; and that they recognised slaveholders as Christian brethren. To make Dr. Channing's argument of any force, it must be shown that Paul not only enjoined obedience to a despotic monarch, but that he recognised Nero as a Christian. When this is done, then we shall admit that our argument is fairly met, and that it is just as true that he sanctioned the conduct of Nero as that he acknowledged the lawfulness of slavery.

The two cases, however, are analogous as to one important point. The fact that Paul enjoins obedience under a despotic government, is a valid argument to prove, not that he sanctioned the conduct of the reigning Roman emperor, but that he did not consider the possession of despotic power a crime. The argument of Dr. C. would be far stronger, and the two cases more exactly parallel, had one of the emperors become a penitent believer during the apostolic age, and been admitted to the Christian church by inspired men, notwithstanding the fact that he retained his office and authority. But even without this latter decisive circumstance, we acknowledge that the mere holding of despotic power is proved not to be a crime by the fact that the apostles enjoined obedience to those who exercised it. Thus far the arguments are analogous; and they prove that both political despotism and domestic slavery belong in morals to the *adiaphora*, to things indifferent. They may be expedient or inexpedient, right or wrong, according to circumstances. Belonging to the same class, they should be treated in the same way. Neither is it to be denounced as necessarily sinful, and to be abolished immediately under all circumstances and at all hazards. Both should be left to the operation of those general principles of the gospel, which have peacefully meliorated political institutions, and destroyed domestic slavery throughout the greater part of Christendom.

The truth on this subject is so obvious that it sometimes escapes

* It need hardly be remarked that the command to obey magistrates, as given in Rom. xiii., 1-3, is subject to the limitation stated above. They are to be obeyed as magistrates; precisely as parents are to be obeyed as parents, husbands as husbands. The command of obedience is expressed as generally, in the last two cases, as in the first. A magistrate beyond the limits of his lawful authority (whatever that may be) has, in virtue of this text, no more claim to obedience, than a parent who, on the strength of the passage, "Children, obey your parents in all things," should command his son to obey him as a monarch or a pope.

unconsciously from the lips of the most strenuous abolitionists. Mr. Birney says, "He would have retained the power and authority of an emperor; yet his oppressions, his cruelties, would have ceased; the very temper that prompted them would have been suppressed; his power would have been put forth for good and not for evil."* Here everything is conceded. The possession of despotic power is thus admitted not to be a crime, even when it extends over millions of men, and subjects their lives as well as their property and services to the will of an individual. What becomes then of the arguments and denunciations of slave-holding, which is despotism on a small scale? Would Mr. Birney continue in the deliberate practice of a crime worse than robbery, piracy, or murder? When he penned the above sentiment, he must have seen that neither by the law of God nor of reason is it necessarily sinful to sustain the relation of master over our fellow creatures; that if this unlimited authority be used for the good of those over whom it extends and for the glory of God, its possessor may be one of the best and most useful of men. It is the abuse of this power for base and selfish purposes which constitutes criminality, and not its simple possession. He may say that the tendency to abuse absolute power is so great that it ought never to be confided to the hands of men. This, as a general rule, is no doubt true, and establishes the inexpediency of all despotic governments whether for the state or the family. But it leaves the morality of the question just where it was, and where it was seen to be, when Mr. Birney said he could with a good conscience be a Roman emperor, i. e., the master of millions of slaves.

The consideration of the Old Testament economy leads us to the same conclusion on this subject. It is not denied that slavery was tolerated among the ancient people of God. Abraham had servants in his family who were "bought with his money," Gen. xvii., 13. "Abimelech took sheep and oxen, and men servants, and maid servants, and gave them unto Abraham." Moses, finding this institution among the Hebrews and all surrounding nations, did not abolish it. He enacted laws directing how slaves were to be treated, on what conditions they were to be liberated, under what circumstances they might, and might not, be sold; he recognises the distinction between slaves and hired servants (Deut. xv., 18); he speaks of the way by which these bondmen might be procured; as by war, by purchase, by the right of creditorship, by the sentence of a judge, by birth; but not by seizing on those who were free, an offence punished by death.† The fact that the Mosaic institutions recognised the lawfulness of slavery is a point too plain to need proof, and is almost universally admitted.

* Quoted by Pres. Young, p. 45, of the Address, &c.

† On the manner in which slaves were acquired, compare Deut. xx., 14; xxi., 10, 11; Ex. xxii., 3; Neh. v., 4, 5; Gen. xiv., 14; xv., 3; xvii., 23; Num. xxxi., 18, 35; Deut. xxv., 44, 46.

As to the manner in which they were to be treated, see Lev. xxv., 39-53; Ex. xx., 10; xxii., 2-8; Deut. xxv., 4-6, &c., &c.

Our argument from this acknowledged fact is, that if God allowed slavery to exist, if he directed how slaves might be lawfully acquired, and how they were to be treated, it is in vain to contend that slaveholding is a sin, and yet profess reverence for the scriptures. Every one must feel that if perjury, murder, or idolatry, had been thus authorized, it would bring the Mosaic institutions into conflict with the eternal principles of morals, and that our faith in the divine origin of one or the other must be given up.

Dr. Channing says, of this argument also, that it proves too much. "If usages sanctioned under the Old Testament, and not forbidden under the New, are right, then our moral code will undergo a sad deterioration. Polygamy was allowed to the Israelites, was the practice of the holiest men, and was common and licensed in the age of the apostles. But the apostles nowhere condemn it, nor was the renunciation of it made an essential condition of admission into the Christian Church." To this we answer, that so far as polygamy and divorce were permitted under the old dispensation, they were lawful, and became so by that permission; and they ceased to be lawful when the permission was withdrawn, and a new law given. That Christ did give a new law on this subject is abundantly evident.* With regard to divorce, it is as explicit as language can make it; and with regard to polygamy it is so plain as to have secured the assent of every portion of the Christian Church in all ages. The very fact that there has been no diversity of opinion or practice among Christians with regard to polygamy, is itself decisive evidence that the will of Christ was clearly revealed on the subject. The temptation to continue the practice was as strong, both from the passions of men, and the sanction of prior ages, as in regard to slavery. Yet we find no traces of the toleration of polygamy in the Christian Church, though slavery long continued to prevail. There is no evidence that the apostles admitted to the fellowship of Christians, those who were guilty of this infraction of the law of marriage. It is indeed possible that in cases where the converts had already more than one wife, the connexion was not broken off. It is evident this must have occasioned great evil. It would lead to the breaking up of families, the separation of parents and children, as well as husbands and wives. Under these circumstances the connexion may have been allowed to continue. It is, however, very doubtful whether even this was permitted. It is remarkable that among the numerous cases of

* "The words of Christ (Matt. xix., 9) may be construed by an easy implication to prohibit polygamy: for if 'whoever putteth away his wife, and *marrieth* another, committeth adultery,' he who marieth another *without* putting away the first, is no less guilty of adultery: because the adultery does not consist in the repudiation of the first wife (for, however unjust and cruel that may be, it is not adultery), but in entering into a second marriage during the legal existence and obligation of the first. The several passages in St. Paul's writings, which speak of marriage, always suppose it to signify the union of one man with one woman."—Paley's Moral Phil., book iii., chap. 6.

conscience connected with marriage, submitted to the apostles, this never occurs.

Dr. Channing uses language much too strong when he says that polygamy was common and licensed in the days of the apostles. It was contra-ry both to Roman and Grecian laws and usages, until the most degenerate periods of the history of those nations. It was very far from being customary among the Jews, though it might have been allowed. It is probable that it was, therefore, comparatively extremely rare in the apostolic age. This accounts for the fact that scarcely any notice is taken of the practice in the New Testament. Wherever marriage is spoken of it seems to be taken for granted, as a well understood fact, that it was a contract for life between one man and one woman; compare Rom. vii., 2, 3; 1 Cor. vii., 1, 2, 39. It is further to be remarked on this subject that marriage is a positive institution. If God had ordained that every man should have two or more wives instead of one, polygamy would have been lawful. But slaveholding is denounced as a *malum in se*; as essentially unjust and wicked. This being the case, it could at no period of the world receive the divine sanction, much less could it have continued in the Christian Church, under the direction of inspired men, when there was nothing to prevent its immediate abolition. The answer then of Dr. Channing is unsatisfactory; first, because polygamy does not belong to the same category in morals as that to which slaveholding is affirmed to belong; and secondly, because it was so plainly prohibited by Christ and his apostles as to secure the assent of all Christians in all ages of the Church.

It is, however, argued that slavery must be sinful because it interferes with the inalienable rights of men. We have already remarked that slavery, in itself considered, is a state of bondage, and nothing more. It is the condition of an individual who is deprived of his personal liberty, and is obliged to labour for another, who has the right to transfer this claim of service at pleasure. That this condition involves the loss of many of the rights which are commonly and properly called natural, because belonging to men, as men, is readily admitted. It is, however, incumbent on those who maintain that slavery is, on this account, necessarily sinful, to show that it is criminal, under all circumstances, to deprive any set of men of a portion of their natural rights. That this broad proposition cannot be maintained, is evident. The very constitution of society supposes the forfeiture of a greater or less amount of these rights, according to its peculiar organization. That it is not only the privilege, but the duty of men to live together in a regularly organized society, is evident from the nature which God has given us; from the impossibility of every man living by and for himself, and from the express declarations of the word of God. The object of the formation of society is the promotion of human virtue and happiness; and the form in which it should be organized, is that which will best secure the

attainment of this object. As, however, the condition of men is so very various, it is impossible that the same form should be equally conducive to happiness and virtue under all circumstances. No one form, therefore, is prescribed in the Bible, or is universally obligatory. The question which form is, under given circumstances, to be adopted, is one of great practical difficulty, and must be left to the decision of those who have the power to decide, on their own responsibility. The question, however, does not depend upon the degree in which these several forms may encroach on the natural rights of men. In the patriarchal age, the most natural, the most feasible, and perhaps the most beneficial form of government was by the head of the family. His power by the law of nature, and the necessity of the case, extended without any other limit than the general principles of morals, over his children, and in the absence of other regular authority, would not terminate when the children arrived at a particular age, but be continued during life. He was the natural umpire between his adult offspring—he was their lawgiver and leader. His authority would naturally extend over his more remote descendants, as they continued to increase, and on his death, might devolve on the next oldest of the family. There is surely nothing in this mode of constituting society which is necessarily immoral. If found to be conducive to the general good, it might be indefinitely continued. It would not suffice to render its abrogation obligatory, to say that all men are born free and equal; that the youth of twenty-one had as good a right to have a voice in the affairs of the family as the aged patriarch; that the right of self-government is indefeasible, &c. Unless it could be shown that the great end of society was not attainable by this mode of organization, and that it would be more securely promoted by some other, it would be an immorality to require or to effect the change. And if a change became, in the course of time, obviously desirable, its nature and extent would be questions to be determined by the peculiar circumstances of the case, and not by the rule of abstract rights. Under some circumstances it might be requisite to confine the legislative power to a single individual; under others to the hands of a few; and under others to commit it to the whole community. It would be absurd to maintain, on the ground of the natural equality of men, that a horde of ignorant and vicious savages should be organized as a pure democracy, if experience taught that such a form of government was destructive to themselves and others. These different modes of constituting civil society are not necessarily either just or unjust, but become the one or the other according to circumstances; and their morality is not determined by the degree in which they encroach upon the natural rights of men, but on the degree in which they promote or retard the progress of human happiness and virtue. In this country we believe that the general good requires us to deprive the whole female sex of the right of self-government. They have no voice in the formation of the

laws which dispose of their persons and property. When married, we despoil them almost entirely of a legal existence, and deny them some of the most essential rights of property. We treat all minors much in the same way, depriving them of many personal and almost all political rights, and that too though they may be far more competent to exercise them aright than many adults. We, moreover, decide that a majority of one may make laws for the whole community, no matter whether the numerical majority have more wisdom or virtue than the minority or not. Our plea for all this is, that the good of the whole is thereby most effectually promoted. This plea, if made out, justifies the case. In England and France they believe that the good of the whole requires that the right of governing, instead of being restricted to all adult males, as we arbitrarily determine, should be confined to that portion of the male population who hold a given amount of property. In Prussia and Russia, they believe with equal confidence, that public security and happiness demand that all power should be in the hands of the king. If they are right in their opinion, they are right in their practice. The principle that social and political organizations are designed for the general good, of course requires they should be allowed to change, as the progress of society may demand. It is very possible that the feudal system may have been well adapted to the state of Europe in the middle ages. The change in the condition of the world, however, has gradually obliterated almost all its features. The villain has become the independent farmer; the lord of the manor, the simple landlord; and the sovereign liege, in whom, according to the fiction of the system, the fee of the whole country vested, has become a constitutional monarch. It may be that another series of changes may convert the tenant into an owner, the lord into a rich commoner, and the monarch into a president. Though these changes have resulted in giving the people the enjoyment of a larger amount of their rights than they formerly possessed, it is not hence to be inferred that they ought centuries ago to have been introduced suddenly or by violence. Christianity "operates as alterative." It was never designed to tear up the institutions of society by the roots. It produces equality not by prostrating trees of all sizes to the ground, but by securing to all the opportunity of growing, and by causing all to grow, until the original disparity is no longer perceptible. All attempts, by human wisdom, to frame society, of a sudden, after a pattern cut by a rule of abstract rights, have failed; and whether they had failed or not, they can never be urged as a matter of moral obligation. It is not enough therefore, in order to prove the sinfulness of slaveholding, to show that it interferes with the natural rights of a portion of the community. It is in this respect analogous to all other social institutions. They are all of them encroachments on human rights, from the freest democracy to the most absolute despotism.

It is further to be remarked that all these rights suppose corres-

ponding duties, and where there is an incompetence for the duty, the claim to exercise the right ceases. No man can justly claim the exercise of any right to the injury of the community of which he is a member. It is because females and minors are judged (though for different reasons) incompetent to the proper discharge of the duties of citizenship, that they are deprived of the right of suffrage. It is on the same principle that a large portion of the inhabitants of France and England are deprived of the same privilege. As it is acknowledged that the slaves may be justly deprived of political rights on the ground of their incompetency to exercise them without injury to the community, it must be admitted, by parity of reason, that they may be justly deprived of personal freedom, if incompetent to exercise it with safety to society. If this is so, then slavery is a question of circumstances, and not a *malum in se*. It must be borne in mind that the object of these remarks is not to prove that the American, the British, or the Russian form of society is expedient or otherwise; much less to show that the slaves in this country are actually unfit for freedom, but simply to prove that the mere fact that slaveholding interferes with natural rights, is not enough to justify the conclusion that it is necessarily and universally sinful.

Another very common and plausible argument on this subject is, that a man cannot be made a matter of property. He cannot be degraded into a brute or chattel without the grossest violation of duty and propriety; and that as slavery confers this right of property in human beings it must, from its very nature, be a crime. We acknowledge the correctness of the principle on which this argument is founded, but deny that it is applicable to the case in hand. We admit that it is not only an enormity, but an impossibility, that a man should be made a thing, as distinguished from a rational and moral being. It is not within the compass of human law to alter the nature of God's creatures. A man must be regarded and treated as a rational being even in his greatest degradation. That he is, in some countries and under some institutions, deprived of many of the rights and privileges of such a being, does not alter his nature. He must be viewed as a man under the most atrocious system of slavery that ever existed. Men do not arraign and try on evidence, and punish on conviction either things or brutes. Yet slaves are under a regular system of laws which, however unjust they may be, recognise their character as accountable beings. When it is inferred from the fact that the slave is called the property of his master, that he is thereby degraded from his rank as a human being, the argument rests on the vagueness of the term *property*. Property is the right of possession and use, and must of necessity vary according to the nature of the objects to which it attaches. A man has property in his wife, in his children, in his domestic animals, in his fields and in his forests. That is, he has the right to the possession and use of these several objects according to their nature. He has no more right to use a brute as a log

of wood, in virtue of the right of property, than he has to use a man as a brute. There are general principles of rectitude obligatory on all men, which require them to treat all the creatures of God according to the nature which he has given them. The man who should burn his horse because it was his property, would find no justification in that plea either before God or man. When therefore it is said that one man is the property of another, it can only mean that the one has a right to use the other *as a man*, but not as a brute or as a thing. He has no right to treat him as he may lawfully treat his ox, or a tree. He can convert his person to no use to which a human being may not, by the laws of God and nature, be properly applied. When this idea of property comes to be analysed, it is found to be nothing more than a claim of service either for life or for a term of years. This claim is transferable, and is of the nature of property, and is consequently liable for the debts of the owner, and subject to his disposal by will or otherwise. It is probable that the slave is called the property of his master in the statute books, for the same reason that children are called the servants of their parents, or that wives are said to be the same person with their husbands and to have no separate existence of their own. These are mere technicalities designed to facilitate certain legal processes. Calling a child a servant does not alter his relation to his father; and a wife is still a woman, though the courts may rule her out of existence. In like manner where the law declares that the slave shall be deemed and adjudged to be a chattel personal in the hands of his master, it does not alter his nature, nor does it confer on the master any right to use him in a manner inconsistent with that nature. As there are certain moral principles which direct how brutes are to be used by those to whom they belong, so there are fixed principles which determine how a man may be used. These legal enactments, therefore, are not intended to legislate away the nature of the slave as a human being; they serve to facilitate the transfer of the master's claim of service, and to render that claim the more readily liable for his debts. The transfer of authority and claim of service from one master to another, is in principle analogous to transfer of subjects from one sovereign to another. This is a matter of frequent occurrence. By the treaty of Vienna, for example, a large part of the inhabitants of central Europe changed masters. Nearly half of Saxony was transferred to Prussia; Belgium was annexed to Holland. In like manner Louisiana was transferred from France to the United States. In none of these cases were the people consulted. Yet in all a claim of service more or less extended was made over from one power to another. There was a change of masters. The mere transferable character of the master's claim to the slave does not convert the latter into a thing, or degrade him from his rank as human being. Nor does the fact that he is bound to serve for life produce this effect. It is only property in his time for life, instead

of for a term of years. The nature of the relation is not determined by the period of its continuance.

It has, however, been argued that the slave is the property of his master, not only in the sense admitted above, but in the sense assumed in the objection, because his children are under the same obligation of service as the parent. The hereditary character of slavery, however, does not arise out of the idea of the slave as a chattel or thing, a mere matter of property: it depends on the organization of society. In England one man is born a peer, another a commoner; in Russia one is born a noble, another a serf; here one is born a free citizen, another a disfranchised outcast (the free coloured man), and a third a slave. These forms of society, as before remarked, are not necessarily, or in themselves, either just or unjust; but become the one or the other, according to circumstances. Under a state of things in which the best interests of the community would be promoted by the British or Russian organization, they would be just and acceptable to God; but under circumstances in which they would be injurious, they would be unjust. It is absolutely necessary, however, to discriminate between an organization essentially vicious, and one which, being in itself indifferent, may be right or wrong according to circumstances. On the same principle, therefore, that a human being in England is deprived by the mere accident of birth, of the right of suffrage; and in Russia has the small portion of liberty which belongs to a commoner, or the still smaller belonging to a serf; in this country one class is by birth invested with all the rights of citizenship, another (females) is deprived of all political and many personal rights, and a third of even their personal liberty. Whether this organization is right or wrong is not now the question. We are simply showing that the fact that the children of slaves become by birth slaves, is not to be referred to the idea of the master's property in the body and soul of the parent, but results from the form of society, and is analogous to other social institutions, as far as the principle is concerned, that the children take the rank, or the political or social condition of the parent.

We prefer being chargeable with the sin of wearisome repetition, to leaving any room for the misapprehension of our meaning. We, therefore, again remark that we are discussing the mere abstract morality of these forms of social organization, and not their expediency. We have in view the vindication of the character of the inspired writings and inspired men from the charge of having overlooked the blackest of human crimes, and of having recognised the worst of human beings as Christians. We say, therefore, that an institution which deprives a certain portion of the community of their personal liberty, and places them under obligation of service to another portion, is no more necessarily sinful than one which invests an individual with despotic power (such as Mr. Birney would consent to hold); or than one which limits the right of government to a small portion of the people or restricts

it to the male part of the community. However inexpedient, under certain circumstances, any one of these arrangements may be, they are not necessarily immoral, nor do they become such, from the fact that the accident of birth determines the relation in which one part of the community is to stand to the other. In ancient Egypt, as in modern India, birth decided the position and profession of every individual. One was born a priest, another a merchant, another a labourer, another a soldier. As there must always be these classes, it is no more necessarily immoral to have them all determined by hereditary descent, than it was among the Israelites to have all the officers of religion from generation to generation thus determined; or that birth should determine the individual who is to fill a throne or occupy a seat in parliament.

Again, Dr. Wayland argues, if the right to hold slaves be conceded, "there is of course conceded all other rights necessary to insure its possession. Hence, inasmuch as the slave can be held in this condition only while he remains in the lowest state of mental imbecility, it supposes the master to have the right to control his intellectual development just as far as may be necessary to secure entire subjection."* He reasons in the same way to show that the religious knowledge and even eternal happiness of the slave, are as a matter of right conceded to the power of the master, if the right of slaveholding is admitted. The utmost force that can be allowed to this argument is, that the right to hold slaves includes the right to exercise all *proper* means to insure its possession. It is in this respect on a par with all other rights of the same kind. The rights of parents to the service of their children, of husbands to the obedience of their wives, of masters over their apprentices, of creditors over their debtors, of rulers over their subjects, all suppose the right to adopt proper means for their secure enjoyment. They, however, give no sanction to the employment of any and every means which cruelty, suspicion, or jealousy, may choose to deem necessary, nor of any which would be productive of greater general evil than the forfeiture of the rights themselves. According to the ancient law even among the Jews, the power of life and death was granted to the parent; we concede only the power of correction. The old law gave the same power to the husband over the wife. The Roman law confided the person and even life of the debtor to the mercy of the creditor. According to the reasoning of Dr. Wayland, all these laws must be sanctioned, if the rights which they were deemed necessary to secure, are acknowledged. It is clear, however, that the most unrighteous means may be adopted to secure a proper end, under the plea of necessity. The justice of the plea must be made out on its own grounds, and cannot be assumed on the mere admission of the propriety of the end aimed at. Whether the slaves of this country

may be safely admitted to the enjoyments of personal liberty, is a matter of dispute: but that they could not, consistently with the public welfare, be intrusted with the exercise of political power, is on all hands admitted. It is, then, the acknowledged right of the state to govern them by laws in the formation of which they have no voice. But it is the universal plea of the depositaries of irresponsible power, sustained too by almost universal experience, that men can be brought to submit to political despotism only by being kept in ignorance and poverty. Dr. Wayland, then, if he concedes the right of the state to legislate for the slaves, must, according to his own reasoning, acknowledge the right to adopt all the means necessary for the security of this irresponsible power, and of consequence that the state has the right to keep the blacks in the lowest state of degradation. If he denies the validity of this argument in favour of political despotism, he must renounce his own against the lawfulness of domestic slavery. Dr. Wayland himself would admit the right of the Emperor of Russia to exercise a degree of power over his half civilized subjects, which could not be maintained over an enlightened people, though he would be loath to acknowledge his right to adopt all the means necessary to keep them in their present condition. The acknowledgment, therefore, of the right to hold slaves, does not involve the acknowledgment of the right to adopt measures adapted and intended to perpetuate their present mental and physical degradation.

We have entered much more at length into the abstract argument on this subject than we intended. It was our purpose to confine our remarks to the scriptural view of the question. But the consideration of the objections derived from the general principles of morals, rendered it necessary to enlarge our plan. As it appears to us too clear to admit of either denial or doubt, that the scriptures do sanction slaveholding; that under the old dispensation it was expressly permitted by divine command, and under the New Testament is nowhere forbidden or denounced, but on the contrary, acknowledged to be consistent with the Christian character and profession (that is, consistent with justice, mercy, holiness, love to God and love to man), to declare it to be a heinous crime, is a direct impeachment of the word of God. We, therefore, felt it incumbent upon us to prove, that the sacred scriptures are not in conflict with the first principles of morals; that what they sanction is not the blackest and basest of all offences in the sight of God. To do this, it was necessary to show what slavery is, to distinguish between the relation itself, and the various cruel or unjust laws which may be made either to bring men into it, or to secure its continuance; to show that it no more follows from the admission that the scriptures sanction the right of slaveholding, that they, therefore, sanction all the oppressive slave-laws of any community, than it follows from the admission of the propriety of parental, conjugal, or political relations, that they sanction all the

conflicting codes by which these relations have at different periods and in different countries been regulated.

We have had another motive in the preparation of this article. The assumption that slaveholding is itself a crime, is not only an error, but it is an error fraught with evil consequences. It not merely brings its advocates into conflict with the scriptures, but it does much to retard the progress of freedom; it embitters and divides the members of the community, and distracts the Christian church. Its operation in retarding the progress of freedom is obvious and manifold. In the first place, it directs the battery of the enemies of slavery to the wrong point. It might be easy for them to establish the injustice or cruelty of certain slave-laws, where it is not in their power to establish the sinfulness of slavery itself. They, therefore, waste their strength. Nor is this the least evil. They promote the cause of their opponents. If they do not discriminate between slaveholding and the slave-laws, it gives the slaveholder not merely an excuse but an occasion and a reason for making no such distinction. He is thus led to feel the same conviction in the propriety of the one that he does in that of the other. His mind and conscience may be satisfied that the mere act of holding slaves is not a crime. This is the point, however, to which the abolitionist directs his attention. He examines their arguments, and becomes convinced of their inconclusiveness, and is not only thus rendered impervious to their attacks, but is exasperated by what he considers their unmerited abuse. In the meantime his attention is withdrawn from far more important points; the manner in which he treats his slaves, and the laws enacted for the security of his possession. These are points on which his judgment might be much more really convinced of error, and his conscience of sin.

In the second place, besides fortifying the position and strengthening the purpose of the slaveholder, the error in question divides and weakens the friends of freedom. To secure any valuable result by public sentiment, you must satisfy the public mind and rouse the public conscience. Their passions had better be allowed to rest in peace. As the anti-slavery societies declare it to be their object to convince their fellow-citizens that slaveholding is necessarily a heinous crime in the sight of God, we consider their attempt as desperate, so long as the Bible is regarded as the rule of right and wrong. They can hardly secure either the verdict of the public mind or of the public conscience in behalf of this proposition. Their success hitherto has not been very encouraging, and is certainly not very flattering, if Dr. Channing's account of the class of persons to whom they have principally addressed their arguments, is correct. The tendency of their exertions, be their success great or small, is not to unite, but to divide. They do not carry the judgment or conscience of the people with them. They form, therefore, a class by themselves. Thousands who earnestly desire to see the south convinced of the injustice and

consequent impolicy of their slave-laws, and under this conviction, of their own accord, adopting those principles which the Bible enjoins, and which tend to produce universal intelligence, virtue, liberty and equality, without violence and sudden change, and which thus secure private and public prosperity, stand aloof from the abolitionists, not merely because they disapprove of their spirit and mode of action, but because they do not admit their fundamental principle.

In the third place, the error in question prevents the adoption of the most effectual means of extinguishing the evil. These means are not the opinions or feelings of the non-slaveholding states, nor the denunciation of the holders of slaves, but the improvement, intellectual and moral, of the slaves themselves. Slavery has but two natural and peaceful modes of death. The one is the increase of the slave population until it reaches the point of being unproductive. When the number of slaves becomes so great that the master cannot profitably employ them, he manumits them in self-defence. This point would probably have been reached long ago, in many of the southern states, had not the boundless extent of the south-western sections of the Union presented a constant demand for the surplus hands. Many planters in Virginia and Maryland, whose principles or feelings revolt at the idea of selling their slaves to the south, find that their servants are gradually reducing them to poverty, by consuming more than they produce. The number, however, of slaveholders who entertain these scruples is comparatively small. And as the demand for slave labor in the still unoccupied regions of the extreme south-west is so great, and is likely to be so long continued, it is hopeless to think of slavery dying out by becoming a public burden. The other natural and peaceful mode of extinction, is the gradual elevation of the slaves in knowledge, virtue, and property, to the point at which it is no longer desirable or possible to keep them in bondage. Their chains thus gradually relax, until they fall off entirely. It is in this way that Christianity has abolished both political and domestic bondage, whenever it has had free scope. It enjoins a fair compensation for labour; it insists on the moral and intellectual improvement of all classes of men; it condemns all infractions of marital or parental rights; in short, it requires not only that free scope should be allowed to human improvement, but that all suitable means should be employed for the attainment of that end. The feudal system, as before remarked, has in a great measure been thus outgrown in all the European states. The third estate, formerly hardly recognised as having an existence, is becoming the controlling power in most of those ancient communities. The gradual improvement of the people rendered it impossible and undesirable to deprive them of their just share in the government. And it is precisely in those countries where this improvement is most advanced that the feudal institutions are the most completely obliterated, and the general prosperity the greatest. In like manner the gospel method of extinguishing slavery is by improving the condition of the slave.

The grand question is, How is this to be done? The abolitionist answers, by immediate emancipation. Perhaps he is right, perhaps he is wrong; but whether right or wrong, it is not the practical question for the north. Among a community which have the power to emancipate, it would be perfectly proper to urge that measure on the ground of its being the best means of promoting the great object of the advancement of human happiness and virtue. But the error of the abolitionists is, that they urge this measure from the wrong quarter, and upon the wrong ground. They insist upon immediate abolition because slavery is a sin, and its extinction a duty. If, however, slaveholding is not in itself sinful, its abolition is not necessarily a duty. The question of duty depends upon the effects of the measure, about which men may honestly differ. Those who believe that it would advance the general good, are bound to promote it; while those who believe the reverse, are equally bound to resist it. The abolitionists, by insisting upon one means of improvement, and that on untenable ground, are most effectually working against the adoption of any other means, by destroying the disposition and power to employ them. It is in this way that the error to which we have referred throughout this article, is operating most disadvantageously for the cause of human liberty and happiness. The fact is, that the great duty of the south is not emancipation, but improvement. The former is obligatory only as a means to an end, and therefore, only under circumstances where it would promote that end. In like manner the great duty of despotic governments is not the immediate granting of free institutions, but the constant and assiduous cultivation of the best interests (knowledge, virtue and happiness) of the people. Where free institutions would conduce to this object, they should be granted, and just so far and so fast as this becomes apparent.

Again, the opinion that slaveholding is itself a crime must operate to produce the disunion of the states, and the division of all ecclesiastical societies in this country. The feelings of the people may be excited violently for a time, but the transport soon passes away. But if the conscience is enlisted in the cause, and becomes the controlling principle, the alienation between the north and the south must become permanent. The opposition to southern institutions will be calm, constant, and unappeasable. Just so far as this opinion operates, it will lead those who entertain it to submit to any sacrifices to carry it out, and give it effect. We shall become two nations in feeling, which must soon render us two nations in fact. With regard to the church its operation will be much more summary. If slaveholding is a heinous crime, slaveholders must be excluded from the church. Several of our judicatories have already taken this position. Should the General Assembly adopt it, the church is, ipso facto, divided. If the opinion in question is correct, it must be maintained, whatever are the consequences. We are no advocates of expediency in morals. We

have no more right to teach error in order to prevent evil, than we have a right to do evil to promote good. On the other hand, if the opinion is incorrect, its evil consequences render it a duty to prove and exhibit its unsoundness. It is under the deep impression that the primary assumption of the abolitionists is an error, that its adoption tends to the distraction of the country, and the division of the church; and that it will lead to the longer continuance and greater severity of slavery, that we have felt constrained to do what little we could towards its correction.

We have little apprehension that any one can so far mistake our object, or the purport of our remarks, as to suppose either that we regard slavery as a desirable institution, or that we approve of the slave laws of the southern states. So far from this being the case, the extinction of slavery, and the melioration of those laws, are as sincerely desired by us, as by any of the abolitionists. The question is not about the continuance of slavery, and of the present system, but about the proper method of effecting the removal of the evil. We maintain, that it is not by denouncing slaveholding as a sin, or by universal agitation at the north, but by the improvement of the slaves. It no more follows that because the master has a right to hold slaves, he has a right to keep them in a state of degradation in order to perpetuate their bondage, than that the Emperor of Russia has a right to keep his subjects in ignorance and poverty, in order to secure the permanence and quiet possession of his power. We hold it to be the grand principle of the Gospel, that every man is bound to promote the moral, intellectual and physical improvement of his fellow men. Their civil or political relations are in themselves matters of indifference. Monarchy, aristocracy, democracy, domestic slavery, are right or wrong as they are, for the time being, conducive to this great end, or the reverse. They are not objects to which the improvement of society is to be sacrificed; nor are they strait-jackets to be placed upon the public body to prevent its free development. We think, therefore, that the true method for Christians to treat this subject, is to follow the example of Christ and his apostles in relation both to despotism and slavery. Let them enforce as moral duties the great principles of justice and mercy, and all the specific commands and precepts of the scriptures. If any set of men have servants, bond or free, to whom they refuse a proper compensation for their labour, they violate a moral duty and an express command of scripture. What that compensation should be, depends on a variety of circumstances. In some cases the slaveholder would be glad to compound for the support of his slaves by giving the third or half of the proceeds of his estate. Yet this at the north would be regarded as a full remuneration for the mere labour of production. Under other circumstances, however, a mere support would be very inadequate compensation; and when inadequate, it is unjust. If the compensation be more than a support, the surplus is the property of the labourer, and cannot morally, whatever the laws

may say, be taken from him. The right to accumulate property is an incident to the right of reward for labour. And we believe there are few slaveholding countries in which the right is not practically acknowledged; since we hear so frequently of slaves purchasing their own freedom. It is very common for a certain moderate task* to be assigned as a day's work, which may be regarded as the compensation rendered by the slave for his support. The residue of the day is at his own disposal, and may be employed for his own profit. We are not now, however, concerned about details. The principle that "the labourer is worthy of his hire" and should enjoy it, is a plain principle of morals and command of the Bible, and cannot be violated with impunity.

Again, if any man has servants or others whom he forbids to marry, or whom he separates after marriage, he breaks as clearly a revealed law as any written on the pages of inspiration, or on the human heart. If he interferes unnecessarily with the authority of parents over their children, he again brings himself into collision with his Maker. If any man has under his charge children, apprentices, servants, or slaves, and does not teach them, or cause them to be taught the will of God; if he deliberately opposes their intellectual, moral, or religious improvement, he makes himself a transgressor. That many of the laws of the slaveholding states are opposed to these simple principles of morals, we fully believe; and we do not doubt that they are sinful and ought to be rescinded. If it be asked what would be the consequence of thus acting on the principles of the gospel, of following the example and obeying the precepts of Christ, we answer, the gradual elevation of the slaves in intelligence, virtue and wealth; the peaceable and speedy extinction of slavery; the improvement in general prosperity of all classes of society, and the consequent increase in the sum of human happiness and virtue. This has been the result of acting on these principles in all past ages; and just in proportion as they have been faithfully observed. The degradation of most eastern nations, and of Italy, Spain, and Ireland, are not more striking examples of the consequences of their violation, than Scotland, England, and the non-slaveholding States are of the benefits of their being even imperfectly obeyed. Men cannot alter the laws of God. It would be as easy for them to arrest the action of the force of gravity as to prevent the systematic violation of the principles of morals being productive of evil.

Besides the two methods mentioned above, in which slavery dies a natural and easy death, there are two others by which, as history teaches us, it may be brought to an end. The one is by the non-slaveholders, in virtue of their authority in the state to which the slaves and their masters belonged, passing laws for its extinction. Of this, the northern states and Great Britain are examples. The

* We heard the late Dr. Wisner, after his long visit to the south, say, that the usual task of a slave in South Carolina and Georgia was about the third of a day's work for a northern labourer.

other is by servile insurrections. The former of these two methods is of course out of the question, as it regards most of the southern states; for in almost all of them the slave-owners have the legislative power in their own hands. The south, therefore, has to choose between emancipation by the silent and holy influence of the gospel, securing the elevation of the slaves to the stature and character of freemen, or to abide the issue of a long continued conflict against the laws of God. That the issue will be disastrous there can be no doubt. But whether it will come in the form of a desolating servile insurrection, or in some other shape, it is not for us to say. The choice, however, is between rapidly increasing millions of human beings educated under moral and religious restraints, and attached to the soil by the proceeds of their own labour, or hordes of unenlightened barbarians. If the south deliberately keep these millions in this state of degradation, they must prepare themselves for the natural consequences, whatever they may be.

It may be objected that if the slaves are allowed so to improve as to become freemen, the next step in their progress is that they should become citizens. We admit that it is so. The feudal serf first became a tenant, then a proprietor invested with political power. This is the natural progress of society, and it should be allowed thus freely to expand itself, or it will work its own destruction. If a tree is not allowed to grow erect and in its natural shape, it will become crooked, knotted and worthless, but grow it must. This objection would not be considered of any force, if the slaves in this country were not of a different race from their masters. Still they are men; their colour does not place them beyond the operation of the principles of the gospel, or from under the protection of God. We cannot too frequently remember, that it is our province to do right, it is God's to overrule results.* Let then the north remember that they are bound to follow the example of Christ in the manner of treating slavery, and the south, that they are bound to follow the precepts of Christ in their manner of treating their slaves. If both parties follow the Saviour of men, both will contribute to the promotion of human excellence and happiness, and both will have reason to rejoice in the result.

* If the fact that the master and slave belong to different races, precludes the possibility of their living together on equal terms, the inference is, not that the one has a right to oppress the other, but that they should separate. Whether this should be done by dividing the land between them and giving rise to distinct communities, or by the removal of the inferior class on just and wise conditions, it is not for us to say. We have undertaken only to express an opinion as to the manner in which the Bible directs those who look to it for guidance to treat this difficult subject, and not to trace out a plan to provide for ulterior results. It is for this reason we have said nothing of African colonization; though we regard it as one of the noblest enterprises of modern benevolence.